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ABSTRACT

The major elements of the industry-based planning process can be successfully applied to the development and implementation of international projects in educational institutions. International education programs share the following fundamental structural elements with business and industry: they compete in the market place, and exist by managing human and financial resources toward stated or implied objectives, within the context of socio-economic limitations. When applying a planning process to international programs, the following issues should be considered: (1) sensitivity to the cultural contexts; (2) joint commitment and accountability for developing program plans; (3) goals based on realistic assessments of value and educational needs; (4) clearly defined review process; and (5) clear articulation of institutional accountabilities for program implementation, orientation, and review. A well-planned international project not only contributes to the achievement of the ideal administrative goal of congruence between the needs of the organization and the satisfaction of individuals, but also contributes to the much neglected cross-cultural benefits of international education. To ensure the incorporation of cultural awareness as an element of international projects, specific mechanisms, programs, and components must be in place to promote the association of a broad range of occupational and social classes and encourage personal contact. (HB)

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INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS DEVELOPMENT

FROM DECISION CYCLE TO OVERSEAS REALITY

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INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS DEVELOPMENT

From Decision Cycle to Overseas Reality

ABSTRACT

Historically, International Projects are designed and implemented to achieve well-intentioned sociocultural objectives. To some extent, the major perceived problems encountered in their design and implementation are integrative in nature.

This paper suggests a hypothesis that this results from insufficient consideration of the need for a greater application of an industry-based planning approach to project development.

A discussion of the structural similarities between International Project development and profit-making organizations, will lead us to the need for more responsive and adaptive implementation designs, and will provide examples of how specific planning techniques may be applied.

The suggested model also builds upon the following two significant concepts of successful business, as expressed in the book

"Search for Excellence", by Thomas J. Peters & Robert H. Waterman, Jr.

1) The excellent business is close to its customer and constantly learns from the people it serves.

2) The successful business is a desirable blend between the profit motive and the ability to adapt to a changing environment and shifting consumer needs.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Traditionally, business and industry have viewed planning as a crucial element of their management process in that it has tended to serve as a balance between resource allocation and market potential. In practice, before business and industry implement new systems, or develop new products, structures and mechanisms are usually put in place to plan for anticipated or unanticipated circumstances. This paper suggests that the major elements of the planning process can be successfully applied to the development and implementation of International Projects.

Many social scientists are skeptical about the applicability of business and industrial planning and administrative models to social service institutions. This perceived tendency to place a low value on the aggressive application of planning models to education, are based on three perceived factors:

(i) A limiting conceptual understanding of the elements of the planning function;

(ii) A notion that a profit motive objective is not applicable to educational settings,

(iii) The difficulty in making accurate predictions about the future.

MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

It is my contention that like the business and industrial sectors, International education programs share the following fundamental structural elements of the planning process:

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> they compete in the market place, and exist by managing human and financial resources toward stated or implied objectives, within the context of socio-economic limitations.

At the same time, it must be recognized that because the business sectors are structured along functional lines, rather than along lines of client responsibility (education), they are more conducive to achieving the quantitative elements of planning.

While recognizing the reality of this problem, it must be remembered that planning, in an operational sense, is simply:

> "A systematic consideration of goals and objectives, identification of programs, calculation and allocation of resources, identification of priorities and alternatives, and program evaluation".[1]

In effect, it is a process for providing a structural framework for goals, objectives and strategies as a basis for current implementation strategies and decision making. There is no doubt that International programs contain elements of the above; the contention is that for the most part, they are incidental and not part of a systematic, well-planned response to jointly identified needs.

In the traditional context which recognizes the integrative nature of society, management, and unique organization, the major steps in the planning process are:

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[1] Ohio Board of Regents, Management Improvement Program Planning Universities MD, Distributed by Management Division, Academy of Educational Development, July, 1973, p.18

- Environmental Analysis
- Assessment of Institutional Strategies and Limitations
- Formulation of Assumptions
- Development of Criteria
- Development of Goals and Objectives
- Development of Strategies for Achieving Goals and Objectives
- Development of Long and Short Range Plans
- Evaluation of Project.[2]

APPLICATION OF PLANNING GUIDELINES TO INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

Recognizing the integratedness of cross cultural programming, management, and unique organizations, the following main issues are to be considered in the application of the planning process to International programs:

1. SENSITIVITY TO THE CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Generally, the first phase of project development results in a Needs Analysis. Sometimes, Project Leaders, in their eagerness to satisfy identifiable needs, fail to pay the same attention to the fact that colleges are instruments of social and economic policy, and within that context, the design and implementation of the Needs Analysis must also be especially cognizant to the major societal impacts (social, political, economic and technological).

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[2] Boxx, Randy W. and Johnson, Jerry W, An Examination of Formalized Planning as Currently Used in Institutions of Higher Learning, Planning for Higher Education, Vol. 8, No. 4, Summer, 1980. p.27.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that each culture has its ideal of an educated person, and program objectives should not be perceived as compromising that standard.

2. JOINT COMMITMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DEVELOPING PROGRAM PLANS

For the planning process to be effective, participating individuals and institutions should be jointly involved in the formulation of the goals and objectives; moreover, goals and objectives must be clearly stated, identifiable, and shared.

3. GOALS BASED ON REALISTIC ASSESSMENTS: VALUE AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The matching of the environmental scan, and the development of implementation strategies should be carefully studied. The resultant effect should be realistic goals in terms of the factors influencing participating institutions, and the objective assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses. Too often, because mechanisms are not available for the timely evaluation of this congruency, the implementation decision is made on availability and personal contact.

4. CLEARLY DEFINED REVIEW PROCESS

Each Project should have a clearly defined set of qualitative and quantitative criteria for evaluating, on a continuous basis, the extent to which the stated goals and objectives have been achieved.

5. CLEAR ARTICULATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITES FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION, ORIENTATION AND PROGRAM REVIEW

To a great extent, International projects are designed, developed and implemented to achieve well intentioned socio-cultural objectives. Sometimes, these program successes have been jeopardized or limited because of not focusing upon the significant human elements of the planning process. To reduce the gap between cognitive awareness, and practical implementation, the following communication oriented mechanisms must be documented, understood, and have a mutual sense of commitment:

- Clearly defined individual and institutional responsibilities/accountabilities.
- Clearly defined inter-institutional communication networks.
- Clearly identified contact persons within each of the participating institutions.
- Clearly defined training plans, designed to erase misperceptions.
- Clearly identified and documented institutional support, with its legal implications.

BENEFITS OF WELL PLANNED INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

In the traditional administrative context, the ideal goal of administration is usually to achieve congruence between the needs of the organization, and the satisfaction of individuals. These two elements must also be considered in the implementation of International projects. It may appear that the

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above emphasis has focused upon the quantitative elements of goal achievement; however, inherent to the planning process is the signfiicant qualitative contribution to the much neglected cross-cultural benefits of International programming.

The economic and educational benefits of International projects are usually emphasized, with little or no reference to the cultural awareness benefits. By its very nature, cultural awareness is viewed as a side-effect - unplanned. In reality, there is very little "built-in" mechanism or explicit recognition of the positive cross-cultural values of International programming, and its intrinsic potential contribution to cultural awareness and world understanding.

As a result of this limited perspective of cultural awareness, the deeper and more significant aspects of human understanding, and the potential for receptivity of differing values associated with interpersonal contact, are not fully understood or recognized. Consequently, cultural awareness is viewed as a part-time activity, and rarely becomes enshrined as a stated goal or objective, so that the cultural pluralism that is often bandied about is a concept, and for the most part, is only achieved in a superficial manner.

To address this issue, the following questions should be specifically formulated within each International Project:

1) Within each International Project, what specific components are built in to address the broad concept of cultural awareness?

2) What mechanisms are in place to ensure the association of a broad range of occupational and social classes?

3) Within each International Project, what programs are in place to encourage a wider range of cultural awareness and personal contacts?

CONCLUSION

A planning approach is not a panacea, and does not assure success of International projects; in fact, planning is limited in what it can achieve. The variables of access, funding delays and uncertainties, distance, cultural and communication barriers, are not changed by planning. Yet planning can result in a more responsive framework for examining the achievement of the socio-cultural objectives within the context of a changing environment, and perhaps the greatest benefit is the communication that results from it.

Planning is decision-making, which is one of the most significant aspects of management, and is a process designed to find answers to these three questions:

1) Where are we now?

2) Where do we want to be in the future?

3) What should we do to get there?

In a cross cultural context, this approach is a key ingredient to effective International Project management.

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